

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

February 12, 2013

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## **Arkansas House approves school-safety study (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Arkansas House lawmakers have authorized a study to explore how prepared the state's public schools are to prevent and respond to acts of violence in light of the Connecticut school massacre last year.

The House voted 83 to 6 to approve a measure that directs a legislative committee to determine best practices for preventing violence against students and teachers. The committee would also make suggestions for how schools can improve their readiness. The report would be due by September 2014.

The Senate already approved the measure last week but will need to approve an amendment that includes the House Education Committee in the study before the bill heads to the governor's desk.

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## **Watson Chapel School District launches new millage campaign (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

The Watson Chapel School District Board of Directors approved district superintendent Danny Hazelwood's request to again ask voters to approve a millage increase.

The millage proposal will be the second in the past year for the district. The previous request was voted down in a special election in April 2012. The district has not had a millage increase since 1974.

In a two-part vote at the board's regular monthly meeting Monday night, directors first approved a proposed budget of expenditures for fiscal year 2014-2015, required as part of the leadup to a special election.

The board next approved a resolution calling for a special election May 14.

Under the banner 'Our Kids, Our Future, Our Watson Chapel,' Hazelwood said that the only viable option to prevent a state takeover of the district is the construction of a new kindergarten-first grade building to replace the current Edgewood Elementary campus.

Funds are to be generated by a proposed 2.3-mill increase to the existing 31.8 millage rate that voters will be asked to approve in a May 14 special election.

Hazelwood's pitch

"The existing millage rate of 31.8 is less than every district around us," Hazelwood said. "If the increase is passed the new rate at 34.1 mills will still be the lowest rate in the area. The entire project is estimated at \$10 million with the state committing \$6 million of that amount which is 76 percent of the construction cost and 60 percent of the total project cost."

Hazelwood said the building itself will cost \$8 million to construct while the additional \$2 million will go to the purchase of land to build on and equipment to furnish the school with.

"In my opinion we are at a crossroads related to the age of our facilities and the future of this district," Hazelwood said. "The first step is the construction of a new K-1 building to replace the existing Edgewood Elementary campus. The existing building is 52 years old. The state has already told us that the building needs to be replaced. The cost of maintaining a facility this old continues to rise."

Hazelwood said the existing floorplan at Edgewood is outdated from a safety standpoint because each individual classroom opens to the outside.

"In this day and age it is simply not safe for children to be that exposed," Hazelwood said. "We need a school that keeps all classroom doors centered on an inside corridor."

"In short we are under a state mandate to get something done, so we've got to do something," Hazelwood said. "If we don't the state will look even more at creating a unified Jefferson County school district. [Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Tom] Kimbrell has been talking about this. I think we only have one choice and that is the construction of a new K-1 building."

Hazelwood said the new building as envisioned will meet and exceed the requirements of the state board of education.

"It will become a model to our district," Hazelwood said. "I have assembled a qualified team of people to assist us in this task."

Hazelwood said hard lessons were learned in the district's unsuccessful bid to increase the millage rate by five mills last year.

"The 2.3-mill increase is less than half of what we asked before," Hazelwood said. "In addition there will be no leap-frogging of classes from one building to another as we had planned last year when we hoped to build a new fifth- and sixth-grade building. We will just be moving two classes into a new building."

Hazelwood said part of the district's strategy to get the millage increase passed is making sure that the plan is communicated clearly to the public.

The new school

Dave Sadler, an architect with Nelson Architectural Group in Pine Bluff, made a presentation that provided an overview of project parameters.

"There are two wooded tracts of land totalling 15 acres that border the current Edgewood campus and this is where we are planning to locate the new building," Sadler said. "Once the project is complete the campus will have a total of 23 acres. Plans are to leave the tract closest to some railroad tracks mostly wooded to act as an acoustic buffer and absorb some of the sound from passing trains."

Sadler said part of the project cost will go toward making infrastructure improvements to Apple Street, which runs in front of the property.

"We will widen Apple and fill in the deep ditch that runs along it," Sadler said. "There is a possibility that the city may be able to help with this."

Richard Taylor, another project architect with Nelson, gave a detailed presentation of the interior of the new building.

“The school will include 12 kindergarten classrooms on the left side of the building,” Taylor said. “They are required to have self-contained toilets. There will be nine first-grade classrooms located on the right side of the building.”

Van Tilbury, president and CEO of East Harding Construction in Little Rock, advised the board of the role his company will play as construction manager.

“The district will have a relationship with us as the manager of the project and we will have a relationship with all of the subcontractors who perform the work,” Tilbury said.

#### Personnel

In other business the board voted unanimously to approve a list of personnel recommendations made by Hazelwood, including one-year employment contract extensions for administrators including Jennifer Barbaree; Cornovious Branch; Schaun Brown; Natasha Dunn; Taryn Echols; Jeff Glover; John Hayden; Ronnie Johnson; Rosie Martin; Brenda Melton; Ronette Metcalf; Anne Shaw; Tim Taylor; William Tietz; Henry Webb; Sandra Williams; and Leydel Willis.

The board approved the hiring of Tonya Hollien as a cafeteria worker; Yaphet Hilton, Tina Louise Thomas, Krristen Crosby, and Tiffani Lunsford as substitute cafeteria workers.

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#### A Healthy Distinction (Texarkana Gazette)



Audra Walters with the Arkansas Department of Health speaks to the Fouke school board Monday during a presentation of a leadership banner for fitness and nutrition education within the district. Fouke school district is one of five in the state receiving the honor.

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#### Arkansas Legislature: New Bills Filed Monday (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

LITTLE ROCK — Among legislation filed Monday in the Legislature were:

- House Joint Resolution 1003 by Rep. Andrea Lea, R-Russellville: To amend Amendment 42 to provide for election of the members of the Arkansas Highway Commission and appointment of the state highway director by the governor.

- HJR 1004 by Rep. Jeremy Gillam, R-Judsonia: The “Arkansas Legislative Equalization Amendment,” to amend Amendment 73 to set new term limits for members of the Legislature. The legislation is a shell bill, with details to be added later.
- Senate Joint Resolution 7 by Sen. Jonathan Dismang, R-Searcy: To amend the Arkansas Constitution concerning administrative rules promulgated by state agencies. Filed as a shell bill.
- House Bill 1294 by Rep. Kim Hammer, R-Benton: A school-choice bill that would allow a student approved for transfer to a non-resident district under a provision of law that is later struck down or repealed to finish school in the new district, and for any present or future sibling to do so.
- HB 1295 by Gillam: To set new awards for lottery scholarships — \$2,000 for freshmen, \$3,000 for sophomores, \$4,000 for juniors and \$5,000 for seniors.
- HB 1296 by Rep. Mark Perry, D-Jacksonville: To create an exemption from the sales and use tax for coins, currency and bullion.
- HB 1297 by Gillam: To exempt accrediting agencies that accredit only institutions of higher education that prepare students for religious vocations from the requirement that they be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
- HB 1298 by Rep. Douglas House, R-North Little Rock: To establish the manner in which and conditions under which the unclaimed cremated remains of a veteran may be interred.
- HB 1299 by Rep. John Edwards, D-Little Rock: To appropriate up to \$14 million in federal funds, up to \$7.5 million in surplus funds and up to \$7 million in cash funds for construction of a new state veterans’ home to replace the one that was shut down in Little Rock last year. The bill also would allow the director of the state Department of Veterans Affairs to accept donations for the project.
- Senate Bill 270 by Sen. Jon Woods, R-Springdale: To allow participation in extracurricular activities by students enrolled in grades 7-12 in public and private schools without a waiting period.
- SB 277 by Dismang: To require insurance companies to pay reimbursement to physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech pathologists that is comparable to the reimbursement they pay to physicians.

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### **Morning mailbag: Schools, courts, accountability (Arkansas Times)**

\* NO FAN OF SCHOOL APPLICANT: The Internet certainly shrinks the size of the world. Still more communications reach my mailbox [on Little Rock school superintendent candidate](#) Walter Milton of Springfield, IL. He has critics. The local newspaper also offers some interesting reading.

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### **Bill would alter lottery scholarship formula (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — A bill introduced by Republican Sen. Johnny Key would change the formula for lottery-funded scholarships.

Key's bill filed Monday would start scholarship recipients at \$2,000 for their freshman year. Scholarship amounts would grow by \$1,000 per year, topping out at \$5,000 in a student's senior year.

Key says community college students would be eligible for the same amounts as university students.

Legislators have to rework the scholarship formula because funding levels can't sustain the current payout of \$4,500 per year for university students and \$2,250 for community college students.

A number of legislators have complained about the high number of students who don't sustain enough credit hours to keep their scholarships. Factoring the rate at which students lose their awards, the program can afford Key's formula.

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### **LR committee preparing for superintendent hunt (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — A committee of city leaders and parents appointed to act as a sounding board on finalists for Little Rock School District superintendent will meet today to prepare for interviewing finalists later this month.

Little Rock City Manager Bruce Moore, civil-rights attorney John Walker and former Little Rock School Board member Baker Kurrus are among the 12 members of the new committee appointed by School Board President Dianne Curry, in part with nominees from the other six members of the School Board.

"I made sure that we have a good balance of people," she said, noting that the committee includes a pastor, a government leader and a Hispanic person, as well as retired educators.

The School Board, which sets policy for the 25,000-student district - the state's largest - is seeking a superintendent to replace Morris Holmes, whose contract with the district expires June 30.

Nine candidates from nine states, including one from Arkansas, applied for the job by the deadline last month.

Representatives of McPherson & Jacobson, executive recruiters of Omaha, Neb., are scheduled to meet with the School Board on Monday to recommend finalists they believe can best provide what the board and community has said it desires in the district and its leader. The School Board is planning to interview finalists the week of Feb. 25.

The board won't go empty-handed into those closed interviews or its deliberation on a final selection.

The advisory committee's job is to interview each finalist over a luncheon. Its members will then submit to the School Board their individual assessments of each finalist, Curry said. The committee members will use unsigned assessment forms developed by the search firm and place them into sealed envelopes for the board to open.

Curry said the committee's luncheon interviews will be open to the public and the assessments will be saved for public review after the board opens the envelopes.

"It should be open," Curry said of the process. "We don't have anything to hide.

I'm trying to make sure this is a clean process."

Curry described the process after talking with the consulting firm Monday and attempting unsuccessfully to reach an attorney for the district regarding the assessment forms.

The advisory committee members will give individual feedback and will not rate the candidates or rank them in any order of preference, Curry said. The committee will be guided by the consulting firm, which has used a similar process in other cities.

Besides Moore, other committee members appointed by Curry from the community are Phillip L. Pointer, the senior pastor of the St. Mark Baptist Church and the father of three children; Marian Lacey, a retired Little Rock School District principal and assistant superintendent; Francennett Herrera, liaison for Gov. Mike Beebe and student at the Clinton School of Public Service; and Patty Barker, a former president of the Little Rock Parent-Teacher Association Council.

Committee members nominated by school board members are Nannette Green, nominated by Norma Johnson; Walker, nominated by Michael Nellums; retired Central High teacher Annice Steadman, nominated by Leslie Fiskien; parent Fran Carter, nominated by Greg Adams; former School Board member Baker Kurrus, nominated by Jody Carreiro, Michael Sanders, nominated by Tommy Branch Jr.; and parent Darryl Swinton, selected by Curry from the southwest part of Little Rock where she lives.

Curry on Monday did not know the job and school affiliations for all of the nominees selected by her board colleagues. And not all of the board members responded to e-mail messages Monday asking about their selections.

In a phone interview, Adams described Carter, whom he nominated, and her husband as parents of an elementary school child. He said the Carters have in recent years actively encouraged other parents to consider district schools.

"They have shown themselves to be very thoughtful and very committed to the public school system," Adams said. "I've been very impressed with her."

Curry did not know Monday whether Walker, who is a member of the Arkansas House of Representatives that is currently in session and who recently had surgery, would be able to participate on the committee or whether a designee might be assigned.

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### **Lawmakers to consider guns at college, spending cap (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)**

LITTLE ROCK — House committees on Tuesday are expected to consider legislation to authorize college personnel to carry a gun on campus and a bill that would cap growth in state government spending at 3 percent annually.

Rep. Charlie Collins, R-Fayetteville, said Monday he planned to present House Bill 1243, his bill concerning guns on campus, in the House Education Committee and to an offer amendment that he said would address concerns raised by college administrators.

As originally written, the bill would allow a staff member at a public college or university to carry a concealed handgun on campus if he or she has a concealed carry-permit. The same would be true for a staff member of a private college or university unless the institution chooses not to allow guns on campus.

Collins said his amendment would allow the board of trustees of public colleges and universities to decide in an annual vote whether to allow guns on campus. It also would allow the board to restrict concealed handguns to certain parts of campus.

“From talking to all of the (House Education Committee) members, I’m quite confident that with this amendment this bill is in very good shape (Tuesday),” he said.

Collins said he filed the bill in response to recent school shootings around the country.

“We’re seeing on college campuses in the United states about every two months shooting incidents, and I believe that one of the reasons for that is because they’re gun-free zones,” he said. “I believe we can deter a lot of these incidents nationwide by allowing concealed-carry holders to carry on a campus.”

Gov. Mike Beebe was noncommittal about the proposal Monday, saying he was interested in hearing from higher education officials.

“To a large extent I think we’re going to be visiting with presidents and chancellors and the board members of the various colleges to get their input before I make any public statements about it,” the governor told reporters. “You know proliferation of some of these guns in some places is often met by the folks who are in charge of those places ... with a great deal of anxiety. So, I think we owe it to college and university folks to get their input before we make any comment.”

Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Hot Springs, said Monday he planned to present HB 1041 on Tuesday in the House Revenue and Taxation Committee. Under the bill, expenditures from the state’s general treasury could not exceed 3 percent more than the previous fiscal year’s spending or the average gross domestic product for the preceding three fiscal years, whichever is smaller.

To date, much of lawmakers’ attention this session has been focused on issues such as abortion and guns. Westerman, the House majority leader, said issues such as spending, taxes and Medicaid should be “starting to take hold as we move forward this week.”

Beebe said Monday he was “absolutely not” supportive of Westerman’s bill.

“They’ve already got that authority. I don’t know where they come up with the idea that they’ve got to do something like that when they’ve already got the power to set the budget anyway,” the governor said.

Beebe said the state has not finished a fiscal year in the red in decades because of the Revenue Stabilization Act passed by each General Assembly to set annual priorities for state spending — and cuts when necessary.

The governor added that the RSA is well known nationally and that when Arnold Schwarzenegger was governor of California “he said California ought to adopt Arkansas’ budget model because it’s the best in the country.”

“It is the best in the country. We don’t take credit for it, it started in the 40s ... and it is a wonderful system and the Legislature is in charge, so they don’t need” a spending cap,” Beebe said.

He also said having a cap on spending “could get you in trouble in a lot of situations with regards to central services like prisons or (school funding) adequacy.”